

## Weather Review: Louisiana, 2000

Drought was the operative weather word for most of Louisiana during 2000. Although several northwestern parishes reported above-average annual rainfall, most of the state was drier-than-normal through the year, with some parishes in the southern half of the state experiencing record or near-record low rainfall. A number of south Louisiana sites reported annual totals which were more than 20" below the mean!

What made the drought situation even more critical for southern Louisiana was its duration. For many parishes, the start of La Nina-driven drought can be traced back to the spring of 1998. The drought was already in "full-force" by January 1st, reaching its greatest intensity at the end of the 2000 summer. If not the most intense drought of the century, the 1998-2000 drought certainly must rank among the two or three most severe droughts of record for most of southern Louisiana. Along the coast, the prolonged run of drier-than-normal weather over the last three years resulted in saltwater intrusion into normally "brackish to fresh" wetlands. A shortage of water -- coupled with salt-water intrusion -- severely curtailed rice and crawfish production, with as much as one-fourth of the state's usual rice acreage going unplanted.

Dry weather enhanced fire threats, prompting fire bans in a number of parishes through the summer. According to the LDAF, nearly 4,800 wildfires broke out across Louisiana during the year, with more than 93,000 acres burned.

**January:** Temperatures averaged nearly 5° above the norm; rainfall totaled only 1" to 3" across the state, extending the La Nina-driven drought into its third year. The month closed with snow and ice creating havoc across the state's northern parishes.

**February:** Much of February was "spring-like", with temperatures averaging 6° above normal. Rainfall was under 2" for all but a few areas, with numerous southern parishes recording less than one-half inch for the month.

**March:** Another warm month -- March's temperatures were 3° to 5° above normal. March rains totaled between 5" and 9" across the northern half of the state, but only 2" to 4" across most southern parishes. Tornadoes on the 15th in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes were responsible for two deaths and several injuries.

**April:** April was the first month of 2000 with below-normal temperatures. Once again, rainfall across the state was above normal for the northern parishes but below normal in the south. Among more than a dozen April tornadoes, a Shreveport-Bossier twister on the 23rd was the most destructive.

**May:** Daytime temperatures reached the mid to upper 90's during May, pushing monthly temperatures 3° above the mean. May rains were marked by extremes: totals of more than 10" for several northern parishes were among the highest ever for May, while several southeastern sites received less than 0.25" for the month, among the lowest May totals of record.

**June:** Temperatures averaged near the norm, with rains running near- to above-normal statewide. Yet rains were insufficient to put a dent in the intensifying drought, and by mid-month, "burn bans" were in place for a number of parishes.

**July:** Afternoon highs reached the triple-digits for a string of dates between July 8th and 21st. July rainfall was 2" to 4" below normal, with the statewide total of under 3" ranking among the ten "lowest" July totals of record.

**August:** For many parishes, August 2000 ranked among the "hottest and driest" Augusts ever! The extreme heat -- combined with monthly rainfall running 2" to 4" below normal -- intensified moisture stresses across the state, with most southern parishes ranked under "severe to extreme" drought categories by month's end.

**September:** September began with highs in the 100's across most of the state, but ended with unusually-cool weather. Rains of 6" to 10" over sections of southeast Louisiana provided a brief respite from the drought, but most of the remaining parishes across the state reported monthly totals that were 1" to 2" below the norm.

**October:** With the drought entering its 30th consecutive month for many parishes, rainfall was 1" to 3" below normal across the state. By month's end, several climate indices suggested that the drought had reached record severity for much of southern and central Louisiana, with all but two parishes included in a petition to the USDA for agricultural disaster assistance.

**November:** Rains returned with a vengeance in November, as the state experienced one of its "wettest" Novembers of record. Monthly totals ranged from 6" to 15" across the state. Wet weather kept temperatures down, making November the first "cooler-than-normal" month since April.

**December:** A series of Arctic air masses delivered a real taste of winter to the Bayou State, as monthly temperatures averaged 5° to 8° below normal, ranking among the five "coldest" Decembers of record. Bitter cold combined with wet weather to produce two ice storms across the northern parishes during the month, resulting in widespread tree and powerline damage.